When Craft Became Art: Modern Japanese Craft and the Mingei Sakka

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Introduction

This paper is an attempt to place the creative works by the craft artists associated with the Mingei movement (often called *Mingei sakka*[1]), in the context of modernity in Japanese craft. I define "modernity" here as the awareness in craft makers, which emerged in Japan around 1910, that their works were first and foremost the creative expression of an individual. Underlying this awareness is the modern concept of individualism, which embraced the freedom of and responsibility for one's own judgment, as opposed to accepting given values.[2]

There have been a number of publications on modern Japanese craft. They largely agree that the notion of individualism was the hallmark of modernity in Japanese craft, and trace its first expressions to the works and ideas of Tomimoto Kenkichi.[3] It seems to me, however, they fall somewhat short of giving a fuller story as to how Tomimoto and other protagonists of modern Japanese craft—including those associated with the Mingei movement—inspired and interacted with one another to foster the notion of individual expression. This perceived constraint seems to come from the fact that they tend to keep their discussions within the border of "craft,"

1 As Dr. Suzuki Sadahiro pointed out at the symposium, the term *Mingei sakka* is at one level contradictory in itself, because it could mean the producer of folk craft, a non-artist or the 'unknown craftsman', particularly if the discussion is focused on the Mingei movement and Yanagi's ideas. For this reason, the term *dōjin sakka* has been used in recent years. On another level, however, the term *Mingei sakka* speaks of the very contradictory position of the creative artists within a movement that advocates suppression of individuality. I have retained the term here with this definition.

2 The concept of individualism was elucidated, among others, by Natsume Sōseki in his 1914 lecture "My Individualism," *Sōseki bunmei ronshū*, Iwanami Shoten, 1986, pp. 97-138.

3 They include among others: Suzuki Kenji, *Genshoku gendai Nihon no bijutsu*:15 *Tōgei*, Shōgakukan, Tokyo, 1978, p. 113; Tsuchida Maki, "Kōgei no kojinshugi [Individualism in Craft], "*20 Seiki Nihon bijutsu saiken 1 1910 nendai: Hikari kagayaku inochi no nagare*, Mie Prefectural Museum of Art, 1995, pp. 217-23, Kaneko Kenji, *Gendai tōgei no zōkei shikō*, Abe Shuppan, Tokyo, 2007 (2001), pp. 75-95, 197-237.

the border which the very producers rejected. One of the aims of this paper is, embracing the fact that the young artists in the 1910s did not differentiate craft from art, to follow the path through which this awareness spread: more specifically, the way those artists, who chose to work in craft material, interpreted Western culture, particularly the ideas and practice of William Morris, and how they, through their creative expression in the craft material, molded modern Japanese craft. The second aim is to show that this thread of modernity runs through the "Mingei group" of craft artists. This implies that the influence of Yanagi Sōetsu's "Mingei theory" on the craft artists of the Mingei movement was not what has generally been thought to be.

The awareness that works of the craft maker should be first and foremost a creative expression of the individual is, by nature, inclusive of all arts: as such, it was initially fostered by practitioners of Western-style art, who were most likely to seek their creative direction in the merging of Western and Japanese traditions. It is important to note that this attitudinal ground was common to the producers of apparently opposing styles—for example, the geometric "modernist" and seemingly anachronistic "folk craft" styles.

Another important point is that this awareness in the maker corresponded to the viewer's attitude (in fact, the viewers and makers largely overlapped in the beginning): the modern viewer abandoned the old concept of "beauty" as a quality that was inherent in an object (thus external to the human being), and asserted that "beauty" was individual perception, what Takashina Shūji describes as "something which moves our mind by presenting a new world hitherto unknown to us."[4] In other words, "beauty" manifests in the eye of the viewer. While this awareness had existed earlier in practice—such as in the Japanese *wabi* tea—it was a modern development to consciously seek imprint of the individual in the work. Furthermore, once the viewer has established (and institutionalized in exhibitions) the practice of "reading" the individual expression in the artwork, the next logical step was to seek "ideas" in any work, be it individual creativity or cultural identity.[5]

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4 *Nihon kindai no biishiki*, Seidosha, Tokyo, 1993, p. 298.

5 A discussion on this conscious 'reading' by the modern viewer is beyond the scope of this paper, and here I only suggest that powerful expressions of this sentiment is found, among others, in Takamura Kōtarō's poem "*Ame ni utaruru katedoraru*" (Cathedral in Rain) [as well as Emile Mâle's comment in *The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth century*: "It is not only the genius of Christianity which is revealed [in the French medieval Cathedral], but ↗

Moves against Craft Academism

During the Meiji period, the agenda for the high-end of Japanese craft was to express the Japanese national character with the highest standard of skills. The most prestigious work for the craft makers were imperial commissions, in which the maker was required to apply "traditional" motifs to express the spirit of modern Japan, particularly in the eyes of foreign dignitaries. At the end of the Meiji era, some of those most respected craftspeople were teaching at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts (TSFA), representing the craft academism. The academism was symbolized by the famous bronze mirror which Katori Hotsuma submitted to the first Teiten [the government-sponsored national art exhibition] to include craft in 1927.

Against this academism, a new concept of craft was emerging: it was perceived and nurtured among those who had been sent overseas in a national bid to modernize Japanese culture and learning or to explore commercial possibilities. Important ideas developed within the individuals who tried to reconcile different values. In the context of craft, this view found its public voice in the *Bijutsu shinpō* (Art News), which became a forum for lively discussions on craft, mostly among Western art practitioners. Iwamura Tōru, known as one of the leaders of Hakubakai alongside Kuroda Seiki and Kume Keiichirō and a progressive teacher at TSFA, was its prolific writer.

Iwamura ingested the ideas of British thinkers John Ruskin and William Morris: he published a three-part summary of Ruskin's Oxford lecture in the first issues of *Bijutsu shinpō*. Ruskin attached moral values to art and craft objects, claiming in his writings such as "The Nature of Gothic" that men had to be happy to create beautiful objects. It was an eye-opening concept for the young Japanese artists at a time when craftsmanship was seen as a national pride and a means to an end. Morris put Ruskin's idea into practice: he disregarded conventions of his time and created objects relying solely on his own taste and judgment. "To beautify life to be happy" was his purpose for creative activities. The pursuit of beauty in society as a whole, furthermore, led Morris to commit himself to socialism.

↘ the genius of France" (Dora Nussey trans.), Harper & Row, New York, etc., 1972 (originally published in French in 1902, English translation in 1913), pp. 398-99. I have suggested Mâle's influence on Yanagi's Mingei theory in "A Revaluation of William Morris's Influence in Japan," *The Journal of the William Morris Society*, vol. 12, no. 4, The William Morris Society, London, 1998, p. 23.

Iwamura's initial activities in the magazine was put on hold due to his third trip to Europe (1904-05), until he resumed it in 1909 with his close friend and Western art historian Sakai Yoshisaburō as the chief editor. From around this time, there was a marked increase in craft-related articles in the magazine, encouraging artists to take up "decorative" or "minor" arts. In fact, two issues were dedicated to "art craft" (*bijutsu kōgei*) in 1913, with subjects ranging from various European and South Pacific islander crafts and ancient and premodern Japanese crafts to the wax-mold casting technique.

As Nakamura Giichi points out, Iwamura "had reached Morris via Ruskin": he believed that art is inextricably linked with social issues, and that no distinction in status should exist between "fine art" and "applied art."[6] Iwamura was not so much an art academic as a critic and gifted communicator: "he had a power to attract others; he always defended young people, was very informal, quick witted, proficient in foreign languages, well read and informed, and extremely eloquent."[7] His 1903 publication "Art Students in Paris (*Pari no bijutsu gakusei*)," for example, was clearly intended to encourage students to question the authority of the Japanese art teachers and administrators. For the nascent modern Japanese craft Iwamura's presence at the TSFA was crucial: he instigated young students to develop themselves rather than submit to their teachers. Takamura Toyochika recalls how excited he and his friends were when Iwamura visited their first exhibition after graduation:

> [Iwamura] saw Ogura Jun's chintz with design of grape vine, and poured praise over it: "This chintz is wonderful. There has been nothing like this in Japan. I'd say this is a Japanese William Morris. Keep up the good work." Ogura was ecstatic. To begin with, around that time in 1915, I dare say, no craft teacher would know of William Morris. At such a bleak time, someone compared us with William Morris. Our young hearts were exuberant. [Iwamura] was clearly over-complimentary, but how his words encouraged us young students![8]

Although Iwamura was unique in his role in interpreting Ruskin and Morris, his

6 *Kindai Nihon bijutsu no sokumen: Meiji bijutsu to Igirisu bijutsu*, Zōkeisha, Tokyo, 1976, pp. 103-05; Iwamura "Editorial," *Bijutsu shinpō*, vol. 11, no. 4, p. 1.

7 Takamura Toyochika, *Jigazō*, Chūōkōron Bijutsu Shuppan, Tokyo, 1968, p. 150.

8 Ibid., p. 51.

personal influences would have been limited had they not been representative of an emerging cultural attitude among the intellectuals at the time. After the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) and the repeal of the bilateral unequal trade treaties in the following years, Japan's elite was increasingly confident in viewing their country and culture in an international context. They felt a need to forge a future direction in art, and saw the existing art establishment as being fettered by conventions.

Among those core intellectuals was Okada Saburōsuke, also a Hakubakai painter and professor at TSFA from 1902. Okada, who was experimenting in leatherwork and other handcrafts began a study group called Gorakukai (Mutual-amusement Society) within TSFA in 1909. Its members ranged from *yōga* and *Nihonga* painters to designers as well as Iwamura and Masaki Naohiko, a long-serving head of the school from 1901 to 1932. Their ideas and activities were propagated via *Bijutsu shinpō*: they considered that the state of crafts was unsatisfactory because the makers were simply following old examples: the subjects were old-fashioned and cliché, product range static, and some new designs were superficial imitations of Western trends.[9] The purpose of Gorakukai, therefore, was for artists to create objects for their own enjoyment, which, it was hoped, would cultivate good taste in society as well as inspire the craft makers to strive for improvement.

In the following year, Takamura Kōtarō published the now famous essay "Midori iro no taiyō" (A Green Sun), in which he claimed that artists should be completely free to express themselves. Kōtarō was a graduate of TSFA and, as a result of Iwamura's strong suggestions, had studied sculpture in the U.S., London, and Paris.[10] The essay was first published in the literary magazine *Subaru*, then reprinted in the next issue of *Bijutsu shinpō*. Kōtarō's contributions to modern craft may have been unintended, but were nevertheless significant: he was the direct catalyst for Bernard Leach's visit to Japan through his friendship with him in London; he shared his newly acquired knowledge on art with his younger brother Toyochika, who came to play a seminal role in the New Craft movement; lastly, in 1910 he opened Rōkandō, the first art gallery in Japan, where he displayed and sold objects without discriminating crafts

9 Sakai Yoshisaburō, "Waga bijutsukōgeikai wa shin zunō o yōkyūsu," *Bijutsu shinpō*, vol. 12, no. 2, 1911, p.1.

10 Takamura Kōtarō, "Bijutsu gakkō no koro," *Takamura Kōtarō zenshū*, Shunjūsha, Tokyo, p. 150.

from "fine art" objects.[11] Prior to the opening of the gallery, Ogiwara Morie wrote in a newspaper:

> My friend Takamura Kōtarō is going to open an art gallery… Its principle is very advanced, and I totally agree with him: he would display any art objects—from painting, sculpture and bronze to rings or cufflinks—as long as they are works of art. On the other hand, unless he recognizes their [artistic] value, he would refuse [to display] them. Even if they were not sold, if good works are displayed people will see them, which will bring the public taste closer to art. I think it is a great plan.[12]

Although Takamura sold the Gallery in less than a year, it continued to operate under different management for some years at a prime position in a busy intellectual district.[13]

Also from around 1910, some artists independently began making crafts in the new spirit. Among them were Fujii Tatsukichi and Tsuda Seifū. Both Fujii and Tsuda had a firsthand experience of Western culture: Fujii in the U.S. and Tsuda in Paris.[14] Fujii moved to Tokyo and became acquainted with other artists, among them Bernard Leach, Takamura Kōtarō, and Tomimoto Kenkichi.[15] Possibly through Kōtarō's recommendation, he was invited to join Gorakukai.

The first TSFA graduate to embrace the new concept of craft was Tomimoto Kenkichi, a design student from 1904 to 1908. On completing his degree, Tomimoto went to London: he famously claimed that the reason for choosing London rather

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11 According to the Takamura Toyochika, the sold items included ceramic seals, Kōun's woodcarvings, Itaya Hazan's vases, poem cards by the poets Yosano Tekkan and his wife Akiko, woodcuts by *sōsaku hanga* artists, Kōtarō's and his friends' sketches and oil paintings (*Kōtarō kaisō*, Yūshindō, Tokyo, 1962, pp. 107-10).

12 From *The Tokyo nichinichi shinbun*, quoted in *Nitten-shi*, vol.2, Nitten-shi Hensan Iinkai, 1980-82, p. 189. Ogiwara died in the same month that Rōkandō opened.

13 Takamura Toyochika, *Kōtarō kaisō*, p. 112.

14 In her discussion of individualism in craft, Tsuchida Maki points out that the Kyoto ceramic artist Kawai Unosuke was also an innovative artist who never went overseas though he had planned to (Tsuchida, op.cit, p. 221). Kawai's works and activities somewhat parallel those of Tomimoto and Tsuda. He also published woodcuts in the Creative Print magazine *Shi to hanga* (Poetry and Prints) in the 1920s.

15 Takamura's Rōkandō was selling Fujii's pieces in 1911 (Takamura Toyochika, *Kōtarō kaisō*, p. 109).

than Paris was "to see firsthand works of William Morris, artist and socialist."[16] Although he did not say how he first came to know about Morris, Iwamura's influence must have been crucial: shortly after entering the TSFA Tomimoto joined the school's mandolin club, which was organized by Iwamura, though he went abroad soon after Tomimoto had joined it.[17]

Perhaps the best-known writing by Tomimoto today is the richly illustrated introduction of William Morris, published in the *Bijutsu shinpō* in 1912. In narrating Morris's life and achievements, Tomimoto repeatedly expressed his admiration for Morris's energy and determination to challenge the poor contemporary taste. He praised Morris for always believing in himself and was faithful to himself in whatever he took up:

> "[Qualities such as] the appeal of the artist's individuality" and "eternal beauty" must be recognized, not only in paintings and sculpture but also in weaving, metalwork, and all other craftwork. Morris was a forerunner like no other in perceiving this. And I feel that he showed us the way through his own practice.[18]

Tomimoto's claim of individuality and beauty echoes Takamura Kōtarō's "A Green Sun": both Tomimoto and Takamura believed that hierarchical distinction should not exist between fine art and craft. Tomimoto became aware of this while visiting the South Kensington Museum where he saw paintings such as Jean-François Millet's *Woodcutters* or Edward Burne-Jones's *Watermill* hanging alongside Persian pottery or Egyptian or Roman textiles, with equal respect paid to all objects.[19] On his return to Japan in 1910, he put this concept into practice, experimenting in furniture design and "new craft": the latter included pulling out his great-grandmother's old loom from the family storehouse and trying to weave.[20] He also produced a number of woodcuts, in which jugs, jars, and bottles frequently appear. The series of creative activities that Tomimoto undertook after his return to Japan, including his essays on crafts, decorative arts, and art in the *Bijutsu shinpō*, was to have an immense

16 Tomimoto, "Tomimoto Kenkichi jiden, "*Iroe jiki: Tomimoto Kenkichi*, Bunkachō, Tokyo, 1969, p. 72.
17 *1908/09 Rondon no seishun: Zengo*, Fukuyama Museum of Art, 1990, p. 5.
18 "Uiriamu Morisu no hanashi 1," *Bijutsu shinpō*, vol. 11, no. 5, 1912, p. 27.
19 "Kōgeihin ni kansuru shiki yori 1," *Bijutsu shinpō*, vol. 11, no. 6, p. 9.
20 Ibid., pp. 12-13.

influence on younger craft producers and print artists.

Through the encounter with Bernard Leach, Tomimoto took up ceramics in 1912. Tomimoto's approach to ceramics signalled a decisive break with the past in that from the beginning he conceived the process of clay molding and firing as uncompromising creative process.[21] For Tomimoto, however, ceramics were not simply a means of self-expression—he was also conscious of his role in changing the society's attitude towards originality and good taste. The advent of his new attitudes towards ceramics was parallelled by the Hyūzankai/Fyūzankai exhibitions (1912 and 1913), the first anti-academic art exhibition, which included prints and crafts among the exhibits.

Thus, the modern concept of craft as creative process of self-expression developed and first practiced outside the traditional industry, mostly among the practitioners and supporters of Western art. It was a relatively small section within the elite circle,[22] and one may surmise that this helped them foster the notion without direct confrontation with existing craft practitioners in its early years. Also, those artists with the advantage of having firsthand experience of Western culture and art were able to shape their ideas in the context of Japan's relationship with the West after the Japanese victory in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05): a relationship which was no longer that of the provider and consumer of exotic culture, but, at least in the young artists' minds, between equals. In this context, one cannot overestimate the significance of Bernard Leach's presence as "one of them."

Leach first tried his hand in Raku pottery in 1911 and began studying under Kenzan VI in 1912. Leach admits that he and Tomimoto "carried many a suggestion from the illustrations in the late Charles J. Lomax's [*Quaint*] *Old English Pottery* into our early raku pieces."[23] From the beginning of their "career," Leach and Tomimoto

21 Kaneko Kenji in Yabe Yoshiaki (ed.), *Nihon yakimono-shi*, Bijutsu Shuppansha, Tokyo, 1998, pp.165-66.

22 According to Eguchi Keiichi, the number of university students in 1925 was eight in every 10,000 of the population, while in 1987 it was 160 in every 10,000. Considering the fact that the 1987 figure excludes the two-year 'college' students, a substantial section of the higher education recipients, the gap between the 'educated elite' and the 'schooled public' in the 1920s was very wide. See *Taikei Nihon no rekishi*: *14 Futatsu no taisen*, Shōgakukan, Tokyo, 1993, p. 151.

23 *A Potter's Book*, Faber and Faber, London, 1976, p. 33.

showed their pottery at various group exhibitions alongside their artworks—prints, sketches, engravings, and furniture. These novel displays created a new context for ceramics, which forced the audience to take a new approach to viewing them.

In February 1912, the coterie members of the magazine *Shirakaba* held an exhibition to show three bronzes by Rodin and original prints by Heinrich Vogeler, which they obtained directly from the artists. Also included in the exhibition were Yamawaki Shintoku's painting and Leach's drawings, etchings, and pottery.[24] Leach's pottery, shown in this context, had a lasting impact on Kawai Kanjirō, an aspiring pottery student at the Tokyo Industrial High School (Tōkyō Kōgyō Kōtō Gakkō). He later recalled:

> This Westerner, who had made a step towards a new pottery, was a great astonishment to me. I felt indignant to see an alien kind of life thrown into ceramics, which we had thought we knew. I was incensed at seeing someone had beaten me to it... our earthenware teacup had been given a handle to become a [Western] teacup... the Chinese ginger jar had turned into a vase. Our traditional pieces had been reborn.[25]

Kawai's complex emotions are telling. It is one thing to see objects made by a Westerner: it is quite another to see a Westerner making objects on the Japanese soil, with happy ignorance of, and disregard for, the context and concept of Japanese traditions.[26] At the same time, Kawai's candid confession that he felt "incensed" reveals that an urge to create something new was simmering within this ambitious potter. Hamada Shōji, Kawai's fellow student and lifelong friend, shared his ambition. It was not the elegance, refinement and technical perfection of his teacher Itaya Hazan that attracted him. "The two "grand champions" of pottery were Leach and Tomimoto," Hamada recalled thinking at the time, and he decided that "the work of Leach and Tomimoto had shown me the direction I wanted to follow."[27]

The task of confronting and negotiating with the craft academism at TSFA on behalf

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24 *Shirakaba*, February 1912, p. 161.

25 Kawai Kanjirō, *Hi no chikai*, Kōdansha, Tokyo, 1996, p. 64.

26 For further discussion on Leach's interactions with other craft artists see Tsuchida, op. cit., pp. 221-22.

27 Leach, Bernard, *Hamada: Potter*, Kodansha International, Tokyo and New York, 1975, pp. 93-94.

of the individualist craft fell on Takamura Toyochika and his fellow students. Unlike Tomimoto, who was a design student, Toyochika enrolled himself in the metal-casting course at TSFA in 1909. Although Toyochika did not have the firsthand knowledge of Western culture, his close relationship with his older brother Kōtarō "filled him in." At TSFA Toyochika was one of the rebellious students who enjoyed support from Iwamura and other prominent *yōga* artists as well as some progressive craft teachers at TSFA (he names Tsuda Shinobu and Akatsuka Jitoku). It seems that Toyochika's unique position between his brother, who was armed with the cutting edge theory on art, and his father Kōun, the prominent sculptor and professor at TSFA, placed him well in this difficult role as a leader of the New Craft movement (*Shinkō kōgei undō*).

As seen above, Toyochika embraced Ruskin's and Morris's ideas on craft. Writing in 1922 he claimed that he was most intrigued by the fact that Morris's happy marriage and building of the Red House eventually led to the widespread reform of modern craft.[28] However, by 1928, he felt he had "grown out of" Morris.[29] What, then, prompted this change? During the six years in between, he began teaching at TSFA, formed Mukei, a group of innovative craft artists, and succeeded, alongside other prominent craft administrators, in setting up the craft section at Teiten. This path led him to become a prominent craft artist in the "new mainstream" through his roles in Teiten, and he and his group focused their creative imagination on the "present," confident that their expression reflected the spirit of new Japan.[30]

Folk Craft and *Mingei Sakka*

We have seen that, in seeking expression outside the established academism of the "court taste," some pioneers of the New Craft turned to alternative aesthetics, particularly folk traditions or "primitive art": the 1913 *Bijutsu shinpō* special issues on crafts included an article on Russian farmers' crafts (by Tsukamoto Yasushi), one on Masaki Naohiko's collection of "primitive art" objects, one on Italian Majolica (Iwamura) and one on the Pacific islander crafts (Asakura Fumio). The idea of appreciating "humble" objects also drew a sympathetic response from the popular notion of humanism.[31]

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28 Takamura Toyochika, *Takamura Toyochika bunshū*, vol. 1, Bunchidō Shoten, Tokyo, 1992, pp. 301-02.

29 *Bunshū*, vol. 2, p. 62.

30 *Bunshū*, vol. 2, p. 63.

31 It should also be noted that the growing taste for folk crafts coincided with the revival of the aesthetic of the *wabi* tea and the re-appreciation of Momoyama ceramics.

Although Masaki claims in his article "Dojin no kōgei"[32] that people who spend their daily life in the modern world take interest in the opposite—simpler, primitive qualities.[33] But to consider the modern taste for folk craft as nostalgia for "lost innocence" or "anti-modern" may be too simplistic. A more realistic interpretation is that, while the modern mind became aware of, and began to appreciate, "the new world hitherto unknown to us," the urban lifestyle, with all the conveniences associated with it, provided a new context for "the rustic" to be incorporated.[34] It was like Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites admired and adopted Gothic-style furniture and decoration with no intention of surrendering the advantages of modern life. For his part, Tomimoto, during his sojourn in London and through his trip to the Middle East (as an assistant to a Japanese architect), developed an affinity with Medieval Persian pottery, which he found to have "a finesse of the smart urbanite."[35] His taste for it is evident in his early ceramics as well as woodcuts. Thus, in the newly formed urban consumer society, "memories of the past" became commodities for the modern urbanites to satisfy their desire to control and own the past: the folk craft was "new": not because it had not existed before, but because it was viewed with a fresh eye and given a new role.

Tomimoto, who was urging art critics to pay closer attention to people's art in1913,[36] traveled to Korea in 1923 to see firsthand its ceramics, particularly Choson dynasty white porcelain which he admired.[37] Hamada Shōji returned to Japan in early 1924 and joined Kawai Kanjirō in Kyoto, where he began looking at ordinary objects with a fresh sensitivity cultivated through his four-year sojourn in Britain where he discovered British folk wares, especially slipware. Kawai, who had been struggling to find new inspiration to grow out of his established style, was at first apprehensive but quickly tuned in.[38] In his talk a few months later at the Kyoto Imperial Museum entitled "Tōki no shosanshin" (The Heart of the Production of Ceramics), Kawai not only acknowledged the kind of beauty inherent in mass-produced ceramics

32 The term *dojin* (natives) would be considered derogatory in today's ethical standard.

33 *Bijutsu shinpō*, vol. 12, no. 6, p. 213.

34 Mark B. Sandberg, "Effigy and Narrative: Looking into the Nineteenth-century Folk Museum," Charney & Schwartz (eds.), *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles & London, 1995, p. 333.

35 Tomimoto, "Kōgei hin ni kansuru shiki yori 1," *Bijutsu shinpō*, vol. 11, no. 6, p. 10.

36 *Bijutsu shinpō*, vol. 2, no. 3, p. 35.

37 *Tomimoto Kenkichi chosakushū*, Satsuki Shobō, Kyoto, 1981, pp. 634-35.

38 Leach, Bernard, *Hamada: Potter*, pp. 149-50.

made "to make a living," but also probed into how such beauty is manifested: "when the material is handled in the most economic way possible, without impeding the production process, the products are furnished with beauty."[39] Kawai's works from this period (second half of 1920s) show clear influence of folk crafts such as slipware and "horse-eye" plates.

It seems that, for Kawai, folk craft played a similar role to what Ruskin's and Morris's ideas did for Takamura Toyochika and his fellow students. As a highly accomplished ceramicist, Kawai was not concerned with his techniques, but was seeking new "ideas" outside the accepted "beauty" in ceramics. The "ideas" of folk craft, once he learned from Hamada to read them, freed Kawai from the mindset of conventional aesthetics. This eventually led him to develop his own powerfully expressive ceramics.

In Kyoto, Hamada and Kawai formed a close friendship with Yanagi Sōetsu (Muneyoshi). The three men coined the word *Mingei* (short term for *minshū-teki kōgei*) and joined forces with like-minded collectors Aoyama Jirō and Ishimaru Shigeharu in 1926 in their crusade for a wider recognition of folk crafts through collecting and showing them. Because folk crafts had always been close to his heart, it was natural for Tomimoto that he also joined the group.

Yanagi, however, began to pursue his own agenda. While he carefully selected "extraordinary" pieces of folk craft through his connoisseur's eye, in the same way as the *wabi* tea masters did, the "ideas" that he read in them and their interpretation became the single focus of his mental labor, which eventually crystallized into his Mingei theory.[40] As his appreciation of folk craft progressed from an expression of his personal taste to a pursuit of Truth, the equilibrium between the "ideas" and the quality of their execution (which makes an object "extraordinary") was broken; in his writings, the artistic quality of the object as a whole became insignificant as he pushed his emphasis on the "idea" in folk craft—the collective character or

39 "Tōki no shosanshin," *Kyoto Teikoku Hakubutsukan kōenshū*, vol. 1, 1924, p.13. I am grateful to Ms. Sagi Tamae, Kawai Kanjirō's House, for providing me with a copy of the lecture paper.

40 For Yanagi's Mingei theory and its sources, see: Tsurumi Shunsuke, *Yanagi Sōetsu*, Heibonsha, 1987; Frolet, Elizabeth, *Yanagi Sōetsu: Ou les elements d'une renaissance artistique japonaise*, Publications de la Sorbonne, 1986; Nakami Mari, *Yanagi Sōetsu: Jidai to shisō*, Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 2003; Kikuchi Yūko, *Japanese Modernization and Mingei Theory: Cultural Nationalism and Oriental Orientalism*, Routledge Curzon, London and New York, 2004.

cultural identity: he placed it above individual expression, and insisted that craft artists should strive to delete traces of individualism from their work. In so doing, he presented a new aesthetic hierarchy.[41] Thus, while Yanagi's Mingei theory freed many people from the existing hierarchy of high and low art, he imposed a new hierarchy on them, while leaving the question of quality (i.e. why some pieces are better than others) largely unanswered. Yanagi's insistence on his system of aesthetic hierarchy eventually alienated connoisseur-collectors of the original group such as Aoyama Jirō, and craft makers such as Kusube Yaichi. At the same time, his religious zeal for Truth drew individuals who interpreted Yanagi's Mingei theory as a manual for producing and appreciating beauty. These individuals, among them Yoshida Shōya and Shikiba Ryūzaburō, started revival of regional crafts—the New Mingei. This new movement, inspired exclusively by Yanagi's aesthetic, became the mainstream of the movement with the establishment of the Japan Mingei Association (Nihon Mingei Kyōkai) in 1934 and the publication of the *Gekkan mingei* in 1936. This development was the last straw for Tomimoto, who had stayed with the group despite his disagreements with Yanagi's theory, possibly because he saw the group as a forum for discussion of future direction including production of beautiful crafts which were accessible to the wider public.[42]

Despite Yanagi's insistence that craft makers should strive to erase individuality from their work, younger *Mingei sakka* followed the path pioneered by Tomimoto, Kawai, and Hamada. Kuroda Tatsuaki, for example, was inspired by Tomimoto's "Yōhen zakki" (Notes by the Kiln) (1923) and admired Kawai because he was "an artist":[43] when Kuroda's older brother criticized Kuroda's works at his first exhibition saying that they were "toys," that is, they were less than professional work, Kuroda's reply was, "skills can be measured, but expression cannot."[44] Kuroda clearly intended to emulate the "ideas" of folk craft in his own creative work, and studied Korean and Western furniture for inspiration.[45]

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41 I am referring to his classification of craft: aristocratic, individualist and folk (mechanical and guild) crafts.

42 See *Kōgei* no. 37, 1933, pp. 62-74.

43 *Mingei* no. 495, Nihon Mingei Kyōkai, 1994, p. 4.

44 Personal contact with Kuroda Kenkichi, 1993.

45 Many of his 'ideas' can be traced to a German book of Western furniture, given by Yanagi when Kuroda was at the Kamigamo Craft Cooperative (Personal contact with Mrs. Kuroda, his widow, 1993). According to his son Kenkichi, Kuroda used to say that his ideal image of furniture was a fifteenth-century Tyrolean bed for a child (Personal contact with Kuroda Kenkichi, 1993).

If the "second generation" of the *Mingei sakka* such as Kuroda, Serizawa Keisuke, and others did not try to "suppress individuality," how did they reconcile their work with the philosophy of the Mingei movement? It seems there were two distinct groups within the movement at the time. Kuroda refers to the Mingei movement as "a brotherhood-like group searching for truth, which later came to be called the 'Mingei movement'."[46] This "brotherhood" consisted of the craft artists or *Mingei sakka*, who drew inspiration from the "ideas"of folk craft and who enjoyed mutual support and encouragement from patrons such as Mizutani Ryōichi as well as Ōhara Magosaburō and Sōichirō, the two generations of the industrial family. Mizutani Ryōichi, a senior administrative officer of the Department of Commerce and Industry, was accomplished in tea ceremony and was amateur noh performer. As such, he was a defender of *jōtemono* in craft, which Yanagi dismissed as 'aristocratic' and thus not the 'true craft', although he was careful not to appear contradictory to Yanagi. Their different approaches to the "ideas" of folk craft can be observed in their respective conclusions drawn from the proposition that "most of outstanding folk crafts of the past are nameless." Yanagi says:

> Who made that masterpiece? Anyone of the district in that period could have. In this kind of environment [a rural community], individuals would be dissolved into the community… Here, all egoism has been abandoned, all assertions are suppressed, and there remains only a speechless vessel. "Is there a word that speaks better than this silence?," a monk asked. He also wrote, "Silence is the word of God."[47]

Mizutani, on the other hand, proceeds:

> "Namelessness" is not another word for "mediocrity." Being nameless means nothing less than the fact that it was the "mainstream craft of the age," backed by the concerted support of the people. It was the product in which the power of the people is too strong to identify it with the name of an individual.[48]

Mizutani's view is best observed in one issue of *Kōgei* which he edited. In the eighty-first issue of the magazine, he included an essay by Yanagi Yoshitaka, Yanagi's

46 *Mingei*, no. 495, 1994, p. 4.
47 "Kōgei no bi," section 9.
48 "Kyōdōtai seikatsu to kōgei," *Kōgei*, no. 27, pp. 15-16.

nephew and a weaver and Mizutani's protégé. The essay is a wholehearted praise of noh costumes, the "idea" of which could not be further from that of folk crafts. Mizutani became a mentor to the younger artists of the Mingei group, such as Yanagi Yoshitaka, Munakata Shikō, and Serizawa Keisuke, and Yoshitaka's article may serve as a proof of the extent of Mizutani's influence on the young and inspired craft artists, in his attempt to keep a balanced aesthetic within the movement.

It seems that Mizutani saw the aim of the movement to be creating mainstream crafts which were inspired by the "ideas" of a wide range of Western, Asian, and Japanese folk crafts, and which committed to continuation, not repetition, of the tradition. And he considered that the success of the movement hinged on the awareness of the future craft artists. It was unfortunate for the movement that the New Mingei group grew too strong for Mizutani's view to develop into a strong current within the Mingei movement. It seems that, as the frequency of the publication of *Kōgei* dwindled, he seemed to lose his grounds within the movement. The *Gekkan mingei* (Mingei Monthly), started under Shikiba Ryūzaburō's editorship, was heavily biased towards the revival Mingei—which in Mizutani's eyes would have been largely "mediocre."

In Conclusion

The *Mingei sakka*, then, were of modernist lineage as much as their counterparts of the New Craft movement. Despite the different styles of their works, the 'idea' expressed in them originated at the time when craft became art. It appears that Yanagi's insistence that the craft artist should strive to delete individuality from his/her work did not have a significant effect even on the younger craft artists such as Kuroda Tatsuaki, let alone his contemporaries who were the very pioneers of individualism in craft (although only Leach and Tomimoto were vocal in its cause). Yanagi's abhorrence of "individualism" seems to have been more in his Mingei theory rather than in practice: his close associate Kawai was one of the most expressive individualists in modern Japanese craft. It is likely that the craft artists who were close to him knew this well.[49]

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49 Okamura Kichiemon, a stencil artist of the Mingei group, suggested that there had been an arrangement between Yanagi and Mizutani, in which the latter took care of craft artists while Yanagi helped and oversaw the New Mingei movement. See Okamura, *Yanagi Sōetsu to shoki Mingei undō*, Tamagawa Daigaku Shuppanbu, Tokyo, 1991, pp. 95-96.

What, then, was Yanagi's contribution to those creative craft artists of the Mingei movement (and beyond)? I do not have a ready answer to the question at this stage, except to suggest that, as a non-practitioner Yanagi could only inspire, but not instruct, the *Mingei sakka*. And perhaps the most important inspiration Yanagi provided to them was his collection of "extraordinary" pieces of folk craft. If Mingei sakka had discovered folk craft of their own accord to emulate in their work, Yanagi's collection must have cemented the decision and continually provided inspiration.

Lastly, in this paper I identified the origin of modernity in Japanese craft as the concept of individualism among the practitioners of Western art, who considered craft as self-expression of the (craft) artist. Today, about a hundred years later, the concept of self-expression seems to have diffused and diluted to obscurity. It may be necessary to return to the point of departure and reinvestigate other values that the "modernity" had left out: for example, the value of the division of labor, which the early "modernists" vehemently attacked; or the value of "ideas" other than individual creativity, such as collective memory. And, perhaps in the latter, Yanagi's Mingei theory may again offer a fresh inspiration.

[I would like to thank Ms. Tsuchida Maki and Dr. Suzuki Sadahiro for their valuable suggestions to my original symposium presentation.]

In my original symposium discussion, I introduced criteria for craftwork/artwork, developed by Marea Gazzard, an Australian ceramic sculptor. During the 1970s in Australia, she and a textile artist demonstrated a non-functional use for traditional materials, which triggered a series of debates over art and craft boundaries. Gazzard refused to be drawn into the debate, saying that "hierarchy" of works should not be based on the materials but "on the existence of ideas and the success of their execution in whatever medium is adopted."[i] I found the criteria a useful tool, as the term "ideas" allows the viewer to see not only beyond the so-called art/craft boundaries but also beyond the craft artist's "intentions" in an object to include the "collective memory" of the maker, thus making it applicable to works by both

[i] Marea Gazzard quoted in France, Christine, *Marea Gazzard: Form and Clay*, Craftsman House, Sydney, 1994, p. 75.

the "unknown craftsman" and the *mingei sakka*. At the symposium, however, doubts were raised about the application of the concept to Japanese works without examining its validity in the different contexts, i.e. prewar Japan and the 1970s Australia. I have taken the comment on board, but such an examination would obscure the main discussion of this paper, so I have removed the reference to Gazzard's criteria in this final version.]